













# SPEECH OF C. M. CLAY

BEFORE THE YOUNG MEN'S REPUBLICAN CENTRAL UNION OF NEW YORK,  
IN THE TABERNACLE, OCTOBER 21<sup>st</sup>, 1856.

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*Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

The principles of the Republican party, which I stand here to-night to vindicate, have received no impetus from success: so, defeat cannot weaken their power. This presidential contest involves no less an issue than that which aroused our fathers in 1776 to a separation from the British Crown. Indeed it is but a continuation of that struggle, which Jefferson, the great leader of the Democracy, in all the power of all his antecedents, himself the drawer of the Declaration of Independence, did not dare to carry out, in his old age, but which he declared was yet to be determined; leaving it, in his own words, to younger men to accomplish that revolution, which he and his compatriots had but "begun" in 1776. This question then is above mere party success: it involves not only measures and principles, but distinct civilizations. On one side are the world-long advocates of despotism; the arbitrary rule of the few over the many; appealing to those old worn out arguments of Caste, Divine right, and force. On the other side are those great principles of 1776; recognizing man in the sacred-

ness of individuality, without regard to his antecedents, and assigning him consideration according to merit only. The Southern idea; the North—the other. The first constitution of 1789 was adopted by Massachusetts, and others (not of the same policy) were subsequently adopted. The embryo principle was carried out into effect in 1850. You, of the North, are the descendants of Protestantism—Luther, of Old England, of New York, of the civil institutions you believe in, of liberty; and hence, when in 1789, it was easy for you to adopt a constitution was antagonistic to your own, and to your constitutions to the last of the century, it exists in the free states of the Union. In history, I stand here to defend the calumny of mere negroes, and the slaves. If some of these slaves, and their slaves South, they go to the political action of the North, received those glorious influences, and the force, fashioned these splendid free states of the Union. On the other hand, the leading minds and Puritans of the South in common with the North, made law, and so far as political institutions are yet, the great mass of the Southern people receive or avow this great idea. They are the descendants of the British aristocracy, of Walter Raleigh's, the Lord Falklands, and the sons of the nobility and the farmers and



always exaggerate the ideas of their superiors. It was because these men did not recognize the idea of man's equality, as proclaimed by our Fathers, that the Federal Constitution was so long delayed. This was the great obstacle in the way of its formation, and its final adoption. And hence, although Washington, and Jefferson, and Madison, and Henry, and Lee, and other leading men of the South favored this idea, there still remained in the South oligarchical and despotic elements of government. Here, then, were the two distinct principles: the one despotic, and relying upon force; the other republican, and appealing to the better sentiments of mankind for its sanction. I need not say to you, that these principles are incompatible with each other. Hence, notwithstanding there was a peace and truce proclaimed, and an equilibrium in a common government, as if there was eternal fraternity; yet, there has been, of necessity, from the beginning, a conflict going on between them, deepening and widening from 1789, until now, in 1856, they stand face to face, openly contending for absolute supremacy. I thank God it is so. As this question must be settled, the sooner it is settled the better. If oligarchy be better than republicanism, then let us accept it now. Let us not only spread it over Kansas—the Territories—over Central North America, to the Pacific, and to the Canada line; but let it come home, and take its place in these free states, as is its right. But if, on the contrary, Liberty is better than Despotism, as I have an indestructible faith that it is; and that you will so decide that it is: then let her take possession of the government, her legitimate domain, now. I know there is a very large class in every community who are governed by their idea of their material interests.

Daniel Webster, in all the greatness of his intellect, and expansion of his sentiments, ventured to make the assertion, that "governments were formed for the protection of property"! Not so, thought our fathers of 1776. They said, governments were instituted for the protection of "life," "liberty," and property. But let those who are so fearful that their material interests will be jeopardied by the agitation of the slavery question, look at the facts. I need but state the condition of Southern society to show you that, so far as all development is concerned, we might determine a priori, that we cannot contend with the institutions of the North. Let us see: there are, in round numbers, 347,000 persons who control the wealth and the government of the South! They hold 3,500,000 slaves, not simply of the African race, but of all complexions; from the jet black of the tropical sun, up to the rosy-checked, the blue-eyed and auburn-haired; such as I see before me to-night. This aristocracy may stand in the place of Kings, Marquises and Dukes—slavery may be a necessary conservative element—it may be "the corner stone of liberty"—it may be the solution of the vexed question of capital and labor—it may be a Divine institution—but whatever else it may be,—I say it is not Democracy! But the "great unwashed" are too fastidious to care about "niggerism." Then here are 6,000,000 of Southern whites, subject to the rule of the 347,000 in life, person, property and character, to the same extent in kind, as the African slaves. The same defence may be again made—this may be the best relation of the masses to the governing few—the natural, inevitable order of things—but whatever else it may be, I say once more, it is not Democracy! But what have the Oligarchy done for the 9,000,000 souls under their

control and providence? What have they done for material development? It is true, that it is the interest of the ruling class to get as much labor out of the 9,000,000 as possible; but the ruling class are idle; and, of course, the laborers are idle. How then can material prosperity be developed? Again, we have 3,500,000 operatives, absolutely ignorant of the great natural and artificial powers for the creation of wealth; and 6,500,000 comparatively ignorant. How then, can they compete with those, who, by common schools make the whole people acquainted with the chemical and mechanical powers? Here the children of the rich and poor meet upon terms of perfect equality, and receive a like education; and whatever genius, talent and intellect the man possesses, is developed not for himself only, but for society also. We have taken Man, and subjected him to our will: you have regarded the "higher law," and seized upon the elements—upon steam, upon water-power—upon chemistry, upon electricity—upon the winds, and upon the waves, and made them your omnipotent slaves. We pass by now your acknowledged superiorities, and come to agriculture, where the advocates of slavery, until the overpowering force of statistics were brought to bear, were wont to entrench themselves. There you see a sparse population, spread over an immense territory, of every variety of climate, soil, and production—what does it avail? The educated master scorns to labor; the ignorant, the uninterested slave, shirks all he can. The result is not a progressive and land-improving agriculture, the combined effect of self-interest and intelligent application of scientific processes; but everywhere prevails the "skinning system," which like the army-worm preys upon the virgin fertility of the soil, and marches to new

fields of consumption, leaving desolation and sterility behind. This gentlemen, is not the imagining of a "fanatic" heated by extravagance and deluded by "glittering generalities of revolutionary times"! My witness is the very head and front of the "Chivalry" himself—H. A. Wise, of Virginia. The *New York Herald*, then good authority certainly, reports him in his canvass for Governor, as thus speaking of the desolation of Virginia. With coal, and iron, and marble, and other minerals of unequalled value, they lie untouched as by the hands of the primitive Indians. There is the Blue Ridge penetrating the clouds and pouring down perennial streams of water-power; without manufacturers sufficient to clothe her half naked slaves. Without manufacturers and mining there is no commerce; and with the finest harbors in the world, there is not a ship upon the stocks, nor a sail unfurled! Even in her boasted agriculture she is fast decaying—pursuing the skinning system, she has worn out the finest virgin soil ever spread out to the habitation of men. But Mr. Wise did not confine himself to simple statement, he grew dramatic in his utterance: he described a stranger as passing through the "Old Dominion." "And whose farm is that?" says A. to B. (For your benefit I will portray some of these pictures familiar to all the South.) There, where once corn, wheat and tobacco rewarded luxuriantly the culture of the primitive fields, are the mullen, the brier, and the broom-sedge struggling into feeble existence. The neglected furrow widens and deepens into impassible ravines. The fences are gone. There are the shattered cottage and the broken hearthstone of the laboring white, driven into exile by the strong competition of unpaid labor. The marigolds—the larkspur—

the cockscomb—and the sun-flower, (these rude proofs of divine taste, which oppression cannot entirely crush out from the hearts of the poor,) fed upon by wretched straggling sheep,—are a melancholy commentay upon the justice of God, that the lie shall not live forever! “Well, whose farm is that?” says A. to B.—“That is mine,” says B. the slaveholder—And “whose is that?” “mine too” says B. And yet another, “whose is that?” “That is mine too” said B. reluctantly, and musing, “but look here, stranger, don’t suppose I am so d—d poor as to own all the land about here.” Mr. Wise concludes without telling the people of Virginia that it is Slavery which is the root of all our woe! Yes sir, we took refuge from European oppression beyond the wide Atlantic. We met the savage wild beasts and more savage Indians: we cleared the gloomy forests and the melancholy miasmatic swamps and built up the hearthstone, flattering ourselves that here under our own vine and fig-tree we should for ourselves and our posterity forever find security. But soon that infernal curse, African slavery pursues us to our retreats, and expels us from our homes. Again we pull up stakes, and away over the Alleghany mountains, in the western wilds, we seek once more a home: once more we meet and subdue the same foes, and with renewed hope, we establish our household gods. slavery again pursues us! We fly over the wide Mississippi; into Missouri: move on into Kansas; again it bays, like a hungry bloodhound our fleeing steps. And so it will pursue us: like the voice of destiny to the Wandering Jew crying ever, march—march! until we shall be precipitated in the far Pacific ocean itself! Well did my distinguished friend N. P. Banks tell you in Wall street, that although the South had the great

staples of rice, sugar, tobacco and cotton, a more genial climate, a more fertile soil and 250,000 square miles more territory than the North, yet she only produces  $\frac{1}{7}$ - $\frac{1}{100}$ ths of the agricultural, and only  $\frac{1}{21}$ - $\frac{1}{100}$ ths of the mechanical, mercantile and other productive wealth of the Union! I need not tell you that the statistics and reports of the patent office show that as agriculture languishes, so will manufacturers languish. One is dependent upon the other. Stimulated, scientific agriculture produces the like condition in manufacturers; and the reverse. The supply is regulated by the demand. Yet the South boasts that she lacks manufacturers. A leading Southern journal has ventured to avow that they allowed the villiages to go unrepaired into decay, because they preferred a country population! I was so fanatical as to suppose that cities did not depend upon the good will of any set of gentlemen, however powerful; but, upon fixed laws! I had imagined that cities, were the exponents of the productive and consumptive power of the country; and that where there was a great and productive rural population, there, great cities, the seats of commerce and manufactures, would spring up to supply its wants! The South then in acknowledging her want of cities, admits her poverty, and decline into barbarism! The truth is, we are infinitely behind the North even in agriculture, as otherwise shown. When you make new improvements in the application of power to the development of agriculture, you send your old, useless rubbish down to the Keitts and Brooks' of the South: and whilst you are astonishing the world with Manny's reaper, all the ingenuity of all the slaves, and of all the aristocracy is exhausted in fitting the screws in the old cradles; with which they knock down more grain than they cut. Even

axe and hoe helves, which Northern freemen make during rainy days, are sold in all the South. You are building dwelling houses, and sending them ready to be set up into Kentucky and Tennessee and other slave states: for aught I know they are sent to the land of Quattlebun himself, into South Carolina! If there are no manufacturers, there is no commerce. In vain do men go to Nashville, and to Knoxville, and to Memphis and to Charleston, in their annual farce of Southern conventions, to build up Southern commerce, and to break down the abolition cities of Philadelphia, Boston and New York. The orator rises upon a Northern made carpet; clothed cap-a-pie in Northern fabrics, and offers his resolutions written upon Northern paper, with a Northern made pen, and returns to his home upon a Northern car; or being killed, is put into a Northern shroud, and buried in a Northern coffin, and has his funeral preached from a text in a Northern Bible, and his manes propitiated by a psalm from a Northern hymn book, set to Northern music, And they resolve and resolve: and forthwith there's not another ton of shipping built, or added to the manufactures of the South. And yet these men are not fools! They never invite such men as I to their conventions; because I would tell them that slavery is the cause of their poverty, that it is free labor which they need. Yes, Sirs, free labor, free thought which creates matter anew: which declares "let there be light" and it beams upon the marble columns of your Exchange, streams along illimitable rail-roads—and flashes upon the white canvass of your conquering oaks—which springing from the Divine Intelligence, partakes of its Omnipotence; and out of chaos looms up worlds of unimaginable beauty and glory! They know what they are about: making

and strengthening a Southern faction to act efficiently in dissolving the Union, when they can no longer use it for slavery. When they are driven from every field of fair discussion they cut short the argument by lustily crying out at the top of their voices: "O! cotton is king!" On the contrary I proclaim that — grass is king! When we look at the statistics we find that there are nine staple articles of production, of larger value than cotton! Because the Oligarchy are trying to overthrow the dicta of our Fathers, cotton and free labor are not, therefore, incompatible! I am told by a friend, himself a slaveholder, (and therefore, to them at least a good witness), that in extreme south-western Texas, the Germans, true to their national instincts, reject slave labor; and raise more cotton to the acre (and worth from a cent to a cent and a half more per pound) than the Oligarchy raise. I, myself, can bear testimony that in the extreme South, in New Orleans, on the levee, where the intensity of the Southern sun is increased by reflection from red brick walls, the laboring men — hackmen — draymen — and stevedores are almost exclusively white, and free, and of vigorous health. If the white, free laborer can live there, much more surely can he live in the open and more genial country. These facts come late in life to illustrate what I have always said, that whatever is right is always expedient. Again we are told that cotton performs all the exchanges: and liquidates our foreign debts: and that without it, the commerce of the world would be deranged. But the truth is, this staple is carried abroad and its value more than supplied in teas, silks, wines, brandies and other questionable luxuries. If you were to blot out the whole foreign trade in cotton, the country in the eyes of true political economy would be greatly



the gainer; in domestic industry; in home manufactures; home labor; and a home market for consumption. But grant that I err in all this: are all the hopes of our Fathers; our Christian morality; a higher civilization; and the world's divine aspirations; all to be given up for a little more cotton? More noble, we are told, were the sentiments of the heathen world! When Pompey the Great lay sick and was told that his life depended upon his eating an exotic bird, which could only be found in the aviaries of Lucullus, he turned himself away, with the immortal exclamation "must Pompey die, unless Lucullus had been rich!" But when the economical argument is exhausted, the South turns from despair into triumph, avowing that whatever else you may say about slavery, it builds up men! Well, there is some truth in that. You cannot scare those men of the South. I wish I could say as much for the Northern Democracy! Yet after all it is not any thing inherent in slavery, but the circumstances which attend the governing power, the world over, which give them these elements of rule. I care not whether it be a monarchy or a republic, where there is power, there will be sycophants! Our distinguished friend Emerson, with all his philosophical acuteness, thinks that there is really more courage in the South, than in the North. He argues in this wise: the more the man is sensual, and the more he lacks the moral and intellectual, the more is he brave: and the less he has to live for, the more ready is he to die. Emerson must have been eating late suppers and reading Shakespeare: "thus does conscience make cowards of us all." Thucydides in his oration in memory of those who fell in the Peloponnesian war, thought far differently. It was the spirit of equality and self respect which made the

Athenians invincible, and though they carried the arts of civilized luxury to greater height than the other Greeks, they always conquered them in equal fight. "Not one of these" says he "was at all induced to shrink from danger, through the fondness of those delights which the peaceful affluent life bestows: not one was less lavish of his life, through that flattering hope attendant upon want, that poverty at length might be exchanged for affluence: thinking it more glorious to defend themselves and die in the attempt, than to yield and live, they presented their bodies to the shock of battle and thus discharged the duty, that brave men owe to their Country." No, history bears us out: the purest civilization is ever powerful over the idle and dissolute: those who have most to live for, have ever been the readiest to die, in that defence. Justice and virtue only inspire true courage: and well has it been said and sung, that "men were only brave where women true." Now, fellow citizens, these are the institutions which on this continent contend for the mastery over the republicanism of the North. You cannot avoid the issue. Let us look at some of the straggling facts. Think then of the conquest of Kansas. I lay aside, for the present, all considerations of the right being on the side of Liberty against slavery; all considerations of the violation of a solemn compromise: all considerations of a violated constitution, laws, and our dearest safeguards of all liberty; all considerations of her forcible subjection by an invasion from a sister state and its maintenance by the army of the federal government: and take issue upon this broad idea of "liberty, and union" which their banners flaunt in our faces whenever we bring up these appeals of our brethren—the blood crying up from the

ground in Kansas! Have we not done enough for the Union? I find that in the Constitution of 1789 the word "slave" is not mentioned. How then can this be a government where liberty is sectional and slavery national? I reverse the proposition, and I say, slavery is sectional and liberty national. James Madison, himself a slaveholder, Governor of Virginia, and President of the United States, tells us why slavery was not named in that instrument. He said that when slavery had ceased to exist on this continent, that they did not wish its memory to remain on record. Again, another distinguished democrat, perhaps you have heard the name?—Thomas Jefferson—tells us that the object of the "constitution" and the "union," was to establish Justice and Liberty—not Slavery. Men of New York this is not a matter as to color: the blind adherents of the South who enslave the Black man to-day, will when interest dictates, enslave the White man to-morrow! Where is your love of the "union" and the "constitution," when you trample upon that clause which declares that no person's life, liberty or property shall be taken from him, without "due process of law"? The constitution does not give congress the power to establish slavery in the territories, but forbids the same. It is a rule of law and common sense, that power which is not possessed, cannot be delegated: if congress cannot make slaves, neither can the established territorial government do it—if the territorial government cannot do it, how can the people, who are subjects and not the originators of the territorial government do it? And if the whole people in the territories cannot establish slavery, much less can one or more of the people, Keitt or Brooks, establish Slavery there. If there is any such right of inherent sovereignty in the

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shores, and still in the middle of the afternoon into the  
 wild P. J. and I went to the top of the hill, snows  
 and mountains, and the view was very beautiful with a  
 few clouds in the sky. The mountains were very  
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and like poor Rip Van Winkle he waked up, expecting to see George the Third's portrait hanging at the inn door. So the South will give him a meagre support. The Governor of Virginia finds that he cannot carry even all the Democrats of the Old Dominion for a dissolution of the Union! And I believe that outside of South Carolina a majority of every state are in favor of the perpetuity of the Union. But allow that they are not: how is the Union to be dissolved? I should like to see Keitt and Brooks and Quattlebaum marching up to Washington to take the treasury and the archives! I can imagine why they should like to rob the monies: but why on earth should they seize upon the archives? they could not read them after they had taken them! But suppose a serious attempt made at such a revolution: how are the South to carry on the war? I have heard it said, that the abused old state of Sumners and Wilsons, and Banks, with all its fanaticism has more capital available for war purposes, than all the South put together. Suppose Keitt and Brooks go to the Rothschilds, and other European bankers to borrow money. They say, "Well gentlemen, what's the matter now?" "Why we are going to fight the d——d Yankees." — "What for?" Why it's a nigger war, and we are going to fight about it. "Niggers!" "Well what are they?" "Have they legs, and can they run away?" "Yes sir they are our main property, without which our lands are worthless, and we are ruined!" "Then not a dollar can you get upon such security." But with our President in the chair: with the prestige of government on our side, and the eternal basis of Liberty and Justice to back us, there is no amount of money, which we could not command. But leaving the money question out of debate,

there is no use of disguising the weakness of the South; I speak more in sorrow than in anger; for I am not an enemy of the South: if I were, I would desert her, and leave her to herself; the worst fate that her greatest foe could invoke. There is South Carolina—(I hope Mr. Brooks is not present; I am not prepared for him now, for I would desire to give him other reception, than did the noble and unsuspecting Sumner.)—it is true that she did not send her quota of troops into the revolutionary armies; because, she found it necessary to have them guard at home, her children of the patriarchal institution! The other day, in the Georgia Legislature they would not vote money to send out the nonslaveholders to Kansas, because, as a leading citizen avowed, they needed them, to keep down the slaves at home. Half the population are needed for that. Then there's but three millions of whites to act on the offensive; and you have as many as that in New York. Supposing the North and South of equal prowess; after the battle was over, there would remain fifteen unscathed free states to take peaceable possession of the Union! No, gentlemen, the South are not mad! I remember a year ago this same cry of dissolution of the Union was sent forth from St. John's to the Rio Grande—from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Massachusetts had actually sent mechanics to the House of Representatives and Senate of the United States, and one of them was about to be put into the speaker's chair; a place wont to be filled by the wearers of the purple only! And they cried out, "O Quattlebum we can't stand it, the Union must be dissolved!" You had been engaged in digging canals, and making railroads, and building up cities, and extending your commerce over all the seas; leaving in the hands of the

Oligarchy the whole control of the government. But at last their insolence became intolerable; they mistook your forbearance for cowardice, and your magnanimity for meanness of spirit. You began to arouse yourselves to the fact that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty; you sent a different set of men to Congress, remembering whose blood flows in your veins, you determined to assert that great dictum of Republicanism, that the representative shall be the servant, not the master of the people. How they blustered and threatened! And yet, when Mr. Banks was elected speaker, how they climbed down from their insolent pretensions and Mr. Aiken the largest slaveholder of them all, asked the honor to conduct him to the chair! And from that day to this, it is said, the wooden sword of Quittubum sleeps unavenged in its scabbard! I judge of the future by the past. If Fremont is elected they will roar once more like the very Devil himself—but if you don't run—they will! They will do—what you have been doing the last eighty years, they will—acquiesce!

Ladies, and gentlemen, I care little about men. If the Democracy are satisfied with James Buchanan, surely, we are satisfied with the man of world-wide renown, the noble, the heroic Fremont. I thank God! that which has been imputed to him as a reason why he should not be voted for, is true! It is fit that one of the children of the down-trodden non-slaveholders of the South should be the standard-bearer of the liberties of his caste, and of all mankind!

Men of New York, I think that as a citizen of a republic, I have discharged my duty. Twelve years ago I stood upon this rostrum, and living in a slave state, in the midst of the Oligarchy, knowing their sentiments,



and feeling their power, I warned you of their designs against our common liberty. I warned you against their attempts upon Texas,—a foreign war—and our own subjection. Now, once more, I stand before you in the triumphant fullness of prophecy accomplished, and declare that this issue must be met—that one or the other of these vital principals must utterly prevail. I have discharged my duty. Again I return to the place of my hard and unequal struggle. Ladies, I am sad! Gentlemen, I am sad! I am as a reed shaken by the wind! the voice of one crying in the wilderness, which no man regardeth! What argument have I not exhausted? to what sentiment have I not appealed, by sea and shore calling upon each mute and living thing—in vain? Yet, when I remember that all the experience of all ages—and all the aspirations of all the future—are concentrated in this our threatened Constitution, I return once more to the charge; I would that my voice could reach every Cabin, and every Palace throughout this wide Republic,—that I might say to them, arouse from your fatal security: liberty and slavery cannot coexist, but one or the other must die! But I cannot! The shadows of the days that are gone, gather around me: weeping, bleeding, dying, I sink back into my voiceless woe! Yet whether this question is to be settled by the ballot box or by the cartridge box, men! women! I leave with you my undying aspiration; Oh! my Country, mayest thou yet be free!

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